

Lessons Learned and Best Practices for Operating Safely During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Submitted by Warren Township Schools - Warren, NJ

Contact:

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Topic:

Teacher, Faculty, and Staff Well-Being, Professional Development, and Supports

Target audience:

PreK-12

A short description:

The Warren Township School District convened faculty and staff from all job types and facilities continuously beginning in March 2020. These school and district committees met weekly to review local, state, and federal guidance, research reports, and stakeholder survey responses in order to make recommendations to the Warren Township Board of Education about how to safely return all students and staff to the Warren Township Schools. Embedded in this process were staff check-in surveys that began daily and gradually reduced to semi-monthly.

What makes it a lesson learned or best practice:

The engagement strategy honored educator voice, provided staff members real and meaningful opportunities to provide input in planning, and regularly checked in on how employees were doing during various phases of COVID-19 crisis response and Return to School planning and implementation. Students returned to school at the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year, as scheduled, with the support of employees including two associations - the Warren Township Administrators Association and the Warren Township Education Association and employee morale - as reported in semi-monthly surveys - is very high even in the midst of ongoing challenges and changes to the Return to School plan. The District believes this success is due to the partnership between the Board of Education, its leadership team, employee associations, and all staff members.

The efforts in this area built on one of the district's strategic plan goals adopted in 2020:

- Commitment - Voice & Engagement
- Goal 1 - Streamline existing two-way communications between district stakeholders to maximize consistency, efficiency, and effectiveness.

Whether there is a focus on racial equity and/or another equity focus, such as a focus on historically underserved populations:

Not applicable

Artifacts:Analysis of District Approach

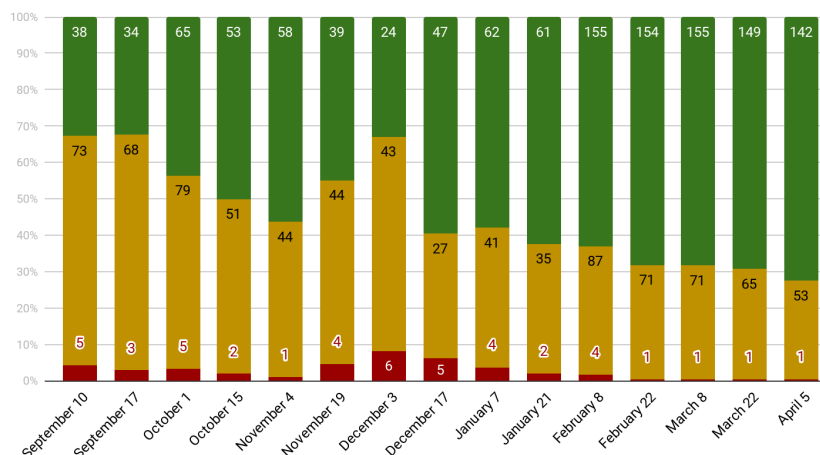
A community member wrote a detailed analysis of the district's approach to reopening communications:

- Keller, L. (2020, December 21). *Exemplifying service-design principles: A school's reopening strategy*. UXmatters.
<https://www.uxmatters.com/mt/archives/2020/12/exemplifying-service-design-principles-a-schools-reopening-strategy.php>

General Communications

- [First Letter to Staff Regarding COVID-19](#)
- [Communication Flow Charts](#)
- [District COVID-19 Website](#)
 - The district maintains a dedicated website with all COVID-19/Return to School communications and information. The FAQ is updated whenever new questions arise from stakeholders.
- Staff Briefings
 - [Day 1 Staff Update](#) - March 16, 2020
 - [Staff Update](#) - April 16, 2020
 - [Last Update](#) - June 16, 2020
 - [Summer Update](#) - July 16, 2020
 - [Return to School Update](#) - August 16, 2020
 - [First Week of School Update](#) - September 10, 2020
 - Example of additional weekly updates
 - [November 19, 2020](#)
 - [January 14, 2021](#)
 - [March 18, 2021](#)
- Superintendent Updates to the Board of Education
 - Each week, the superintendent provides the Board of Education with a brief update on the most recent staff survey results and a summary of staff morale responses broken down into green, yellow, and red bands.
 - The example below is from the April 15th update:

Staff Check-In



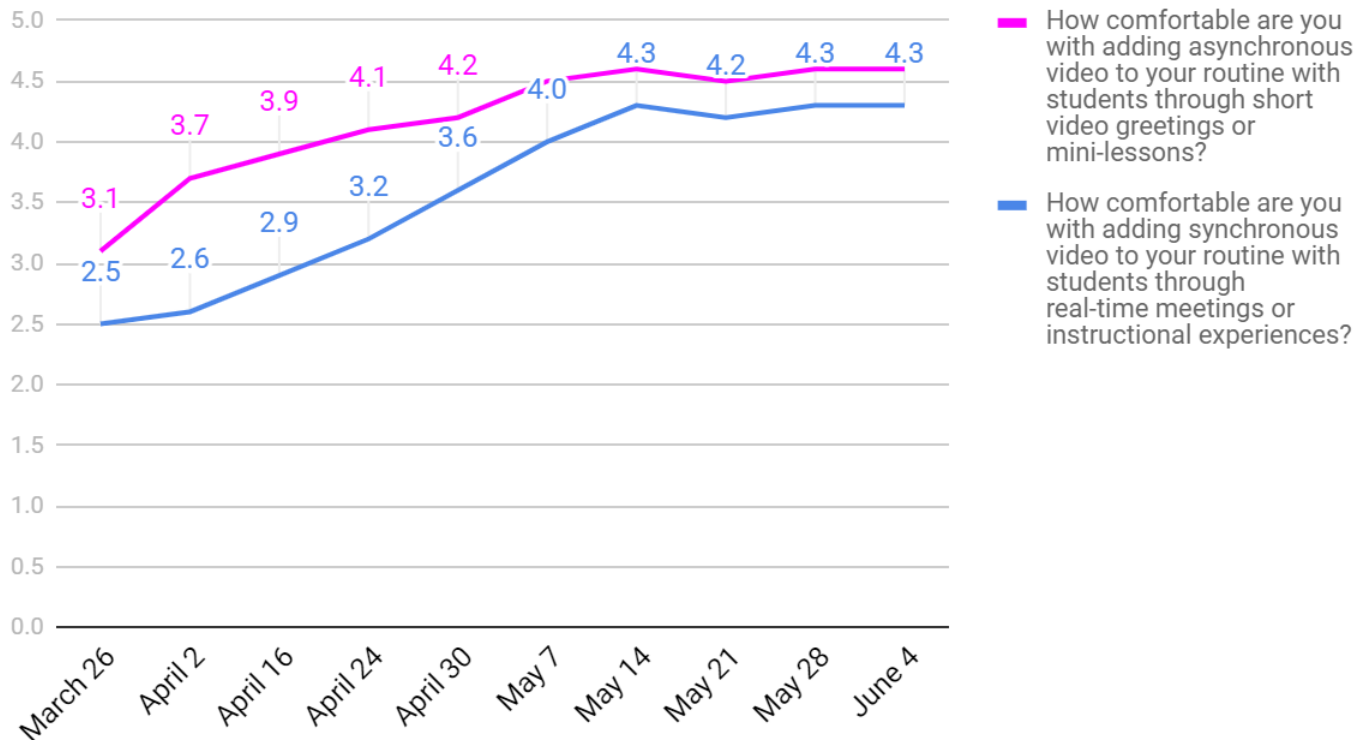
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Surveys

- A [Return to School Perception Survey Data Analysis Protocol](#) was developed and utilized.
- Day 1 Survey
 - March 16, 2020 was the first day of what the District called “Flexible Instruction Days.” The full survey can be found [here](#). This survey was given daily for the rest of March and all of April. The general “how are you doing” question remained consistent while other questions were added and removed to get a sense of how people felt about timely topics.
 - This data was shared with leadership team members immediately so that trends could be analyzed by building. Dips in staff comfort often followed changes to the implementation plan and then rebalanced.
 - Full 2020 spreadsheet for scale:

- Like the daily surveys, these semi-weekly surveys provided timely information to administration about how staff members were doing, what supports they needed, and how they rated their knowledge and skill levels in emerging areas of focus. For example, the May 7th survey asked a question about teachers' comfort with video production. This question was asked several times to get a sense of how staff members' skills evolved with support from administrators and instructional specialists. Such data drove decision-making about distance learning delivery and support provision.

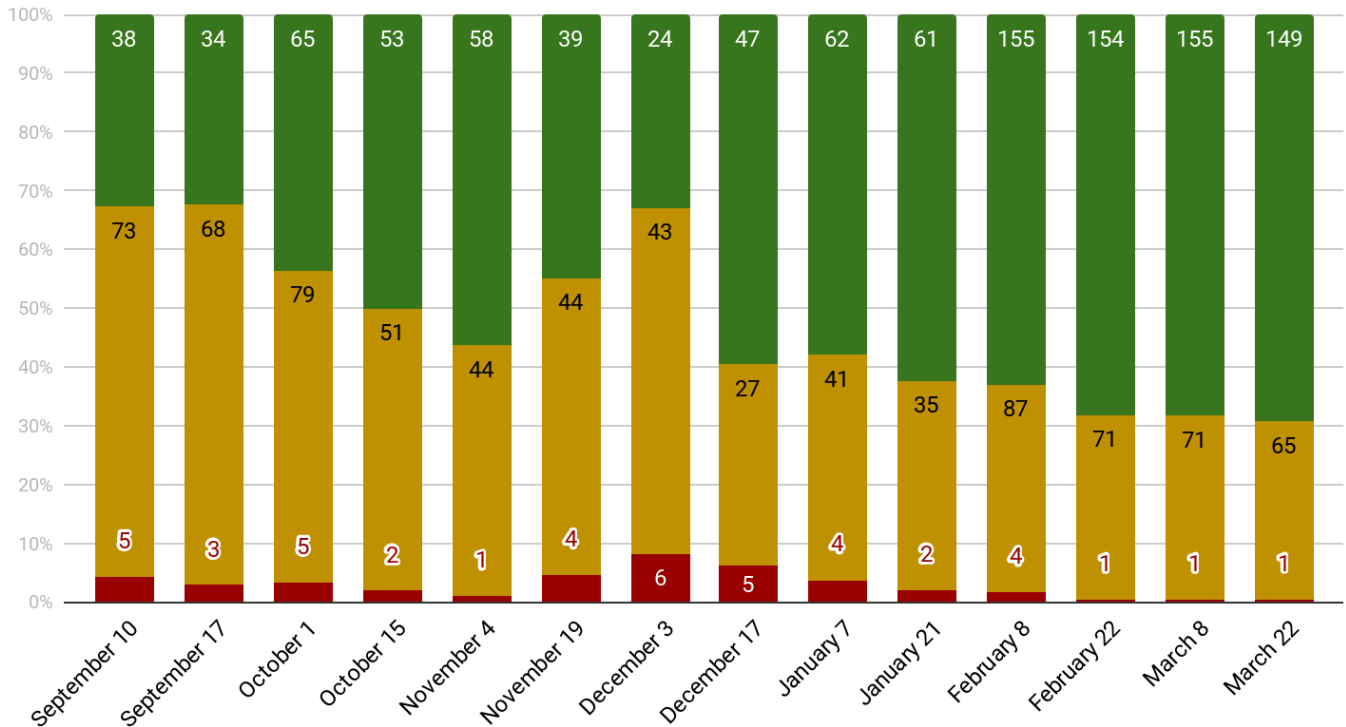
Video Use Comfort Level - Staff



- In June 2020, a concerted effort was made to gather as much survey feedback as possible to guide planning for returning students and staff members to school facilities in September 2020. [This announcement letter](#) led to a survey of perceptions around emerging CDC guidelines.
- When the new school year began in September 2020, the staff surveys switched to being twice per month, aligned to faculty meetings.
 - Staff members who selected “I am not doing well either physically or emotionally and could use some help” were connected with an administrator within 24 hours of survey close for follow-up.

	9/10	9/17	10/1	10/15	11/4	11/18	12/3	12/17	1/7	1/21	2/8	2/22	3/8	3/22
	ALT	ALT	ALT	ALT	ALT	ALT	ALT	ALT	ALT	ALT	ALT	ALT	ALT	ALT
I am feeling fine.	47%	29%	44%	57%	74%	38%	31%	64%	68%	78%	72%	62%	78%	90%
I am feeling stressed or worried but doing o	47%	65%	56%	43%	26%	63%	69%	36%	32%	22%	28%	18%	22%	10%
I am not doing well either physically or emo	7%	6%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
	CS	CS	CS	CS	CS	CS	CS	CS	CS	CS	CS	CS	CS	CS
I am feeling fine.	33%	24%	34%	40%	40%	47%	55%	58%	65%	53%	66%	63%	70%	66%
I am feeling stressed or worried but doing o	63%	76%	62%	60%	60%	53%	45%	42%	35%	47%	34%	37%	30%	34%
I am not doing well either physically or emo	4%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
	MH	MH	MH	MH	MH	MH	MH	MH	MH	MH	MH	MH	MH	MH
I am feeling fine.	33%	36%	50%	89%	78%	55%	80%	75%	80%	73%	62%	79%	81%	76%
I am feeling stressed or worried but doing o	58%	55%	50%	11%	22%	45%	20%	25%	20%	27%	36%	21%	19%	24%
I am not doing well either physically or emo	8%	9%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	3%	0%	0%	0%
	WO	WO	WO	WO	WO	WO	WO	WO	WO	WO	WO	WO	WO	WO
I am feeling fine.	27%	38%	56%	60%	59%	70%	64%	71%	88%	69%	68%	68%	77%	78%
I am feeling stressed or worried but doing o	73%	54%	44%	40%	41%	30%	36%	29%	13%	31%	33%	32%	23%	22%
I am not doing well either physically or emo	0%	8%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
	WMS	WMS	WMS	WMS	WMS	WMS	WMS	WMS	WMS	WMS	WMS	WMS	WMS	WMS
I am feeling fine.	24%	33%	35%	35%	46%	32%	0%	41%	39%	44%	54%	58%	52%	49%
I am feeling stressed or worried but doing o	73%	67%	56%	59%	51%	57%	79%	41%	46%	48%	42%	40%	47%	49%
I am not doing well either physically or emo	3%	0%	9%	5%	3%	11%	21%	19%	14%	7%	4%	2%	1%	2%
	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total
I am feeling fine.	33%	32%	44%	50%	56%	45%	33%	60%	58%	62%	63%	69%	68%	69%
I am feeling stressed or worried but doing o	63%	65%	53%	48%	43%	51%	59%	34%	38%	36%	35%	31%	31%	30%
I am not doing well either physically or emo	4%	3%	3%	2%	1%	5%	8%	6%	4%	2%	2%	1%	0%	1%

Staff Check-In



- Other Stakeholder Surveys
 - Although not the focus of this submission, parents were provided weekly (spring 2020) and monthly (fall/winter 2020-2021) opportunities to share their own feedback. Students were also asked for input throughout the 2020-2021 school year. These surveys included questions on both academic and wellness topics.
- [Perception Survey Data Analysis Protocol](#)
 - To standardize the analysis of school-based data, a protocol was developed and implemented at each school location for the 2020-2021 school year.
- Survey Data Reports
 - Beginning with summer 2020, data from each stakeholder perception survey were captured and published to all staff members and the community through a weekly briefing email. The goal was complete transparency so that people taking the time to complete the surveys could see the results and learn more about how they were being utilized.
 - [June 2020 School Closure Survey Data](#) (Reflection on Spring 2020)
 - [July 2020 Return to School Survey Data](#) (Initial Feelings for Fall 2020)
 - [November 2020 Return to School Survey Data](#) (1st Quarter Reflections)
 - [January 2021 Return to School Survey Data](#) (2nd Quarter Reflections)

Recognition

- National School Public Relations Association - Dr. Matthew A. Mingle, Superintendent to Watch 2020
 - [Profile](#)
 - [Award Information](#)